

## **Fool in the Rain by MonsterSquad**

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**Summary:** As a storm hits their college town, Mike Wheeler and El Hopper each have different reasons for being out in the rain. College AU

## **Fool in the Rain**

Mike Wheeler had his windshield wipers going at full power. As he drove slowly through a blinding rainstorm he cursed himself for having stayed at school so late. Finals were coming up and he had been in the library until closing time, finalizing a paper for molecular biology. He kicked himself for waiting so long to go to the store to get the few grocery items he needed since it was the weekend and there was a huge storm hitting. He hated going to the store when snow was in the forecast as people went crazy over milk and bread. He knew if he didn't stop by though he might be stuck in his apartment for the weekend if the weather got as bad as the meteorologists were saying it would. Plus he wanted some Chinese food from his favorite restaurant which was right next to the store. He figured he could order the food, get what he needed at the store, and be home before 10:00. Then let the storm do its worst. He'd be safe and warm and have food. Pulling into the parking lot, Mike knew he'd need to hurry if for no other reason than to save his sanity. At 9:30 at night the lot was packed with cars. He ran into the restaurant, using his jacket to semi-cover his head as the freezing rain pelted him.

"Hey, can I make an order and then run into the store to get a few things while it's cooking? I'll be super quick. I don't want to stay there any longer than absolutely necessary." Mike directed his question to Jack, who recognized him from all of his trips to the establishment.

"Sure. Do you want your usual? I'll bag it up and it will be waiting. It's crazy over there. I had to go earlier for my mom and I thought I might die." Jack chuckled as he started to send back Mike's order.

"Yeah, but add two extra egg rolls, some fried wontons, and some wonton soup. I want enough to last me through the weekend. I do not want to get out again. Call me lazy." Mike winked at Jack as he pushed the door open and headed over to the grocery store.

The store was hectic to say the very least. There was only wheat bread left, 1% milk, and all of the beer was gone. Sadly only three checkouts were open so Mike grabbed a basket, threw in a loaf of bread, some cheese singles, orange juice, milk, and as he passed the

freezer section his eye was caught on Eggo waffles. He took a box out of the freezer and tossed it in his basket. He might not want just Chinese food all weekend. He couldn't remember when he'd last had Eggos either. He just wanted some.

As if the gods smiled upon him, he got to the front of the store just as a line cleared out and had no wait for his purchases. He exited the store with his goods to find it raining even harder than it had been when he parked his car. He darted inside the restaurant where Jack had his food all bagged up for him. He paid, told his friend to be careful as they were closing and getting home, and braved the storm once again. Mike ran to his car and put his food in the back seat, his jacket soaked by the time he got in the driver's seat which only took a few seconds. He turned the heater up as far as it would go and started making his way to his little one bedroom apartment near campus.

El Hopper had never felt so humiliated in her life. She had been sick and missed a test but her abnormal psychology professor wouldn't let her make it up, something about how she should have phoned him when she knew she wouldn't be there. That didn't sit well with the girl, seeming much too friendly for a professor to be to a student. She had gone to campus in the early evening to try to reason with him, not wanting her grade to drop this close to the end of the semester. She wanted to see if there was any sort of paper or study she could do to make up some points to better her average. What she was not expecting was that he would tell her that the only way to bring up her grade would be to sleep with him. As he had said this he had been pacing around his office and had ended up behind her and breathed his request into her ear, which made her feel nauseated and vile. She had left the office without even speaking to him. Now she was just roaming the sidewalk around campus as she had forgotten her purse with her keys and her roommate, Max, was out of town for the weekend and wouldn't be back until Sunday night, weather permitting. El felt numb, but not just from being cold. She had left the professor's office a little before 8:00, had gone to the student union for a while (that's where she realized she'd left her keys at home and had no way of getting back in), but then decided she was so heartbroken over her grade that she didn't care what happened. Around 9:30 she decided she'd just walk around and think. It was a

terrible idea, but in her sad state and with her feeling so dejected from an authority figure trying to take advantage of her, maybe ruining her scholarship in the process, she just shuffled down the sidewalk in the rain. It didn't take long for her clothes to be saturated, water running off her jacket in cascades. It was coming down in sheets and it was freezing. She was starting to think that maybe she'd have to go to a shelter for the night since she didn't have anywhere to go and hadn't made a lot of friends at school. She was always studying and besides Max, didn't really know a lot of people. She knew some other kids from her high school had wound up at the same school but she never saw them. Or she never looked for them. Now she was cold and sad and about to cry.

She stepped off the sidewalk and into the crosswalk. As she got to the center of the street headlights blinded her and she froze in place.

Mike had been driving towards his apartment on the east side of campus when he noticed a figure crossing the street. It looked like a child from where he first noticed it and his thoughts immediately went to how he'd feel if Holly was out in weather like this. As he got nearer to the person, he could see it was not a child but a girl his age. She had the hood of her jacket over her head but he could see that it was doing very little to keep her dry. He stopped the car and despite the torrents of rain falling, he ran up to her. She was taken aback, not knowing what he meant with his rushing, but as he got to her she recognized him from high school. She would remember his lanky frame and floppy hair forever.

"Hey do you need a ride? El Hopper? Is that you? What are you doing out here? You're going to freeze to death!" Mike didn't even wait for an answer. He steered her towards the passenger side of his car and she gladly climbed inside the warm interior. He ran back around to his side and jumped back into the car.

"Can I take you home? You can't stay in those cold clothes for very much longer or you will definitely get sick." Mike asked with a concerned look on his face.

"I forgot my keys and my roommate is out of town so I don't have anywhere to go." The warm car, the smell of food in the back, the heaviness of her problem in abnormal psych all crashed down on her

and she buried her face in her hands and started to cry.

Mike's brow furrowed. She was breaking his heart with how sad she seemed at this moment. He had known her in high school, had even had a huge crush on her, but he had never said anything and had never given her any inclination of that fact, assuming that she would never feel the same way. Now she was crying in his car and was cold and he'd be damned if he didn't try to fix that.

"Would it be okay if I took you to my place? You can get warm and you can even stay there until your roommate gets back into town. I just went to the store so I have milk and bread so we're all set for snowmageddon." Mike smiled as he noticed she was chuckling at his snowmageddon joke.

"Okay. If it's not too much trouble. I don't want to impose on you"

"El, I feel like an ass because we've apparently been at this same school for all this time and today is the first time I've seen you. I know we weren't best friends in high school or anything but I always thought you were cool. It's definitely no problem for me to help you not die of hypothermia." They rode in silence for a bit as the rain was making it difficult for Mike to see and he was driving slowly as to not hit anything since he couldn't even see the lines on the road anymore. Finally he pulled into a parking space in front of an old apartment building that was not without its charm, should one get to see it in the light of day without a hurricane beating down on it. El just saw rain.

"Okay, I'm on the third floor. You go wait in the foyer of the building and I'll grab my groceries." Mike started to get out of the car.

"I can help you. I'm already wet anyway. I don't want you to drop anything because you were trying to hurry and carry it all." El didn't wait for him to respond as she took the Chinese food and headed to the safety of the building. Mike got his groceries and followed her inside. They climbed the stairs to his apartment and he let her inside, setting his groceries on the counter and taking the food from her. He knew she was cold. She had been shivering in the car even with the heater turned all the way up. He had heard her teeth chattering.

"You need to get warm, quickly. You go take a hot shower. I'll find some clothes for you to wear." Mike crossed the room, gesturing to where the bathroom was.

"If you just have a towel and a blanket I'll be fine." El started peeling her jacket off.

"No that will not work. You are going to get hypothermia and you need to get your body temperature back up to normal. Come on, El. Please do this. Just leave your wet clothes in the floor of the bathroom and we can wash them and dry them tomorrow. Please do this for me." Mike had sad puppy eyes that kind of made her swoon but she couldn't think about that while she was literally shaking from being so cold. She followed him down the hall and he turned on the heater in the bathroom and started the hot water.

"I'm going to find some clothes for you to put on after you feel warmer. I'll wait until I know you're behind the curtain and then I'll just crack the door and set them on the countertop. Okay? Take as long as you want. If you want to use all the hot water that's fine with me." Mike closed the door and headed into his bedroom to rummage through his clothes to find something to fit her.

Mike had grown considerably since his middle school and junior high days. He was close to a foot taller than El now and while still pretty lanky, had filled out enough that he didn't consider himself to be "too skinny" anymore. He knew that any clothes he had would be huge on El, and that wouldn't be a problem when it came to a shirt, but as for the lower half, his boxers would be too big on her waist, same with his pajama pants. He would have to figure out something. His shirt drawer offered him an old Hawkins Middle School AV Club shirt that would be the perfect size but he didn't know what to do for underwear. This was never a problem he thought he'd have to solve. As he went through his drawers he noticed in the back of his sock drawer a plastic package. He pulled it out and laughed. He remembered when the guys had given him these as a gag gift on his birthday. Now he was glad he'd kept them. Grabbing a pair of pajama pants and some fuzzy socks with frogs on them that Holly had given him for Christmas, he went back to the bathroom. He knocked on the door.

"It's okay, Mike. You can come in." El called from inside the shower.

Mike opened the door enough to set the clothes on the counter. He could see the outline of El in the shower and he gulped. She was still so pretty. And she was in his shower. *Get it together, Wheeler.*

Mike went back into the kitchen and put away the groceries. He was glad he had ordered extra Chinese food now because he knew El would be hungry and he wanted to offer something better than grilled cheese. A few minutes later he heard the shower stop. He hoped she'd find the clothes suitable. He set out a couple of plates and the food and figured he'd let her get what she wanted to eat. He hoped she liked Chinese food.

It wasn't long until El appeared back in the main room. She was smirking and kind of holding the pajama pants up with her hand.

"I know, they're too big. Maybe I can find a safety pin or something for you." Mike apologized.

"No, it's fine. Once I'm sitting down they won't fall and I would take them off to sleep anyway." Hearing what she had just said, El's face started to feel hot and she knew she was blushing.

*What the Hell, El? What did you just say?* She looked down and bit her lip. Mike was trying so hard to not picture her getting into bed that he almost spilled the soup trying to ladle it into a bowl. He quickly changed the subject.

"I hope you like Chinese food. I was really wanting some so I picked it up while I was out."

"I do like it. Can I have some soup?" El asked, her big eyes looking at Mike.

He ladled soup into a bowl for her. He put some moo goo gai pan on a plate for her along with an egg roll. "Is that okay? Because you can have anything you want. I have fried wontons as well." Mike eagerly looked at her to see if she was fine with what he had to offer.

"This is great. Where do we sit?" El asked as she looked around the room. She didn't notice a table.

"I usually eat in front of the tv. We can sit on the floor and use the coffee table." They went into the living room area and put their food on the coffee table, which was more of an ottoman that went with Mike's L shaped sectional sofa. "I have this tray I set on this and it makes a pretty sturdy table." He pulled a large board out from under the sofa and set it on the ottoman, creating a nice space for food and drinks.

They ate their food and reminisced about Hawkins. Once they were finished and Mike had cleared the table he put the board away so they could sit on the couch and rest their feet. He had to scoot the ottoman all the way up to the side of the sofa for her but he didn't mind. There was still plenty of room for his legs to not be hanging off. He had gotten her a blanket to cover up with and she was snuggled in.

"El, can I ask why you were walking in the freezing rain?" Mike softly asked.

So El told him all about how she had missed the test and gotten the zero which brought her overall grade down. And about how she'd only wanted to see if there was anything she could do to fix the problem and how her professor had tried to take advantage of her. Mike listened but was seething inside. He asked what the teacher's name was and exactly what department, trying to just sound interested but really making a mental note to get the scum fired . She almost started crying again so Mike put his hand on her shoulder. He kept his distance though so as to not make her feel like he was coming on too strong when she was vulnerable.

El thought his hand on her shoulder felt nice. It felt safe and caring. She hadn't thought about her lack of physical contact with other people, besides hugs from Max, and it occurred to her that it felt good to be touched by people who weren't creepy. Mike definitely wasn't creepy. As she was thinking this he gave her shoulder one final squeeze and then sat back in his seat. She immediately missed his hand being on her shoulder.

"Can I ask you something, Mike?" El looked at him with one eyebrow raised, a smile forming on her lips.



"Ask me what?"

"Why do you have X-Men Underoos?" She started to grin. "I'd show you what they look like but it's too embarrassing." El laid her head back on the back of the sofa and laughed.

"They were a gag gift from Dustin and Lucas on my birthday! I don't know why I kept them. But I saw them when I was looking for clothes and I thought they would fit you . At least better than my boxers would." Mike's face turned red with that statement.

El smiled at Mike. "I am glad you kept them. I actually think they're cute."

A dopey grin spread across Mike's face and they sat in silence for a few minutes. "Um, I was thinking for sleeping you can take my bed and I'll sleep out here. That fine?"

"I can't take your bed. You've already done so much for me today."

"You had a far worse day than I did. You need to get some real rest and I think you'll be warmer under my duvet and will sleep better. I'm not budging on this." Mike tried to look firm.

"Okay. I don't feel right about it but it's your place, your rules." She winked at him, which set the butterflies in his stomach into a whirlwind. "I am tired. Do you mind if I go to bed?"

"Not at all! It's late anyway. I'll show you where my room is. I have an extra toothbrush in the bathroom drawer. It hasn't been opened. Feel free to use it. You can make yourself at home." They walked down the hall and Mike motioned to the drawers as he said this . El went into the bathroom to brush her teeth and Mike went about looking for a couple of blankets and a pillow for himself. He found what he was looking for and had just taken them to the sofa when El came out of the bathroom.

"Well, goodnight, Mike. Thanks again. I really appreciate your help."

"It's not a problem. I wish we had bumped into each other sooner. Maybe under different circumstances, but the outcome is still good." Mike smiled at her. "Night, El." El went into Mike's bedroom and

closed the door.

About thirty seconds after El had gone into his room Mike realized he was still in his jeans and had forgotten to get some pajama pants. It had been less than a minute so he knocked twice but just opened the door anyway.

El had already taken off his too large pajama pants and was standing there at the side of his bed in X-Men Underoos and a Hawkins Middle AV Club shirt. She startled but she didn't make any attempt to cover herself. From her standpoint she wasn't naked and it wasn't a big deal. From Mike's standpoint he gaped, his mouth dry and unable to speak for a minute. *Oh my god, she's sexy as fuck!* Mike thought. He had to rip his gaze away. "I forgot some pajama pants for myself. I'll just grab some." Mike hurried over to his chest of drawers and took the first pair he saw. "Sorry for barging in on you. I didn't realize you would be...anyway, um, night, El." Mike cringed as he closed the door, leaning against it and catching his breath. She was easily the most beautiful thing he'd ever seen. He went into the bathroom, brushed his teeth, and splashed cold water on his face.

Finally all settled into the sofa, Mike was restless. He tossed and turned trying to get comfortable. Not that his sofa wasn't comfortable, but he was still keyed up from having El Hopper in his house and knowing he'd helped her when she really needed help. He hoped they could spend more time together. He had been a fool to never say anything about his crush in high school. The worst that would have happened would have been that she didn't feel the same. That really wouldn't have felt any different in the long run than not saying anything. He decided to be better at communicating in the future.

He had almost fallen asleep when he was jolted awake by a scream. El had screamed out and he had to see what the problem was. He ran down the hallway to his room and opened the door. She was sitting up in the bed with her knees to her chest and the blanket pulled tight around her shoulders. He could hear her softly crying.

"El, what's wrong?" He crossed the room and sat down on the bed. She looked at him with tears in her eyes. One slipped out and rolled down her cheek.

"I guess I had a nightmare and now all I can think about is how I'm going to fail and my scholarship will get revoked and I'll have to leave school and..." She broke off to cry into her hands. Being bold, Mike scooted closer to her and wrapped his arms around her.

"You are not going to fail. You will not have to leave school. We will figure it out. I'll help you, I promise. What that guy, that "teacher" did, is not okay. He should be punished and you should get to take your test. I will do everything I can. I have a little bit of pull in the biology department and I know there are some professors who will help me help you. It will be okay." Mike held her and she cried a little more into his chest, resting her head in the crook of his neck. He started to run his fingers through her hair, not even realizing he was doing it, and she felt herself calming with the soothing feel of his fingers on her scalp. Outside the wind whipped around the building so hard they could hear it.

"Do you think you can go back to sleep?" Mike asked as he continued to rub her back.

"Maybe. Mike?" El sniffed.

"Yeah?"

"Um, this is stupid. Never mind."

"What is it, El?"

El sighed. "Could you stay here with me? It's okay if you don't want to though. I just feel safe with you holding me is all."

Mike didn't know what to think. He wanted to act cool but inside he was freaking out. *El likes that I'm holding her? She feels safe?* Mike swallowed hard.

"Okay, El. I'll stay."

El scooted over to the side of the bed so Mike could get under the covers. He was lying on his back and she nestled herself against him, one of his arms cradling her as she laid her head on his chest, the other reaching over to rub her head.

"Thanks, Mike . I'm sorry if I'm putting you on the spot. You just make me feel...safe. I don't know. It just feels right. Ugh, I sound so stupid." El buried her face in his chest.

"You don't sound stupid, El." *Here goes...say it Mike.* "I actually had the biggest crush on you in high school."

"Really? On me? Why didn't you ever tell me?"

"I was afraid you'd never go for a nerd like me. I talked myself out of it. I'd think I was going to say something and then I'd chicken out at the last minute." Mike shook his head, remembering high school.

"You want to know something funny? I would have said yes. I had a big crush on you too. Max used to make fun of me but I was afraid a smart guy like you wouldn't want the weird girl." El confided, finally, telling her crush how she had felt.

"No way. We could have been together all this time?" Mike said, more to himself. He felt El move her leg over his, snuggling in tighter to his side. As she looked up at him he looked down at her. "We're here now," Mike whispered, both of their faces ever so slowly inching closer to the other.

"We could make up for lost time," El breathed softly, her lips parting as he drew closer.

"Yeah?" Mike's lips were almost on hers now.

"Uh huh," El closed the tiny gap and their lips moved together, years of frustration and rejection and not knowing and unrequited love causing them to melt into one another.

## Chapter 2

El could feel Mike's arms pulling her closer as their mouths slanted and the kiss deepened. She felt as though he couldn't possibly pull her as close as she wanted to be at that moment. Her hand slid from where it had been gripping his shirt and up into his hair and he made the slightest moaning sound. She smiled against his lips. They were still kissing a few minutes later when El shifted so that her body was over Mike's, her legs straddling him. He could feel her smooth legs on

either side of him and it was driving him crazy. He knew they couldn't go too far though, as much as he hated to stop it. He was feeling like bliss but didn't want her to regret anything. With his hands on her hips, he gently pushed her back to his side, causing her to break the kiss and look at him questioningly.

"What's wrong?" El bit her lip and had a worried look on her face. Mike smiled at her and pulled her closer so he could rest his head on hers.

"Nothing's wrong. I just don't want to get too carried away so soon. You've had a weird day and I don't want to do anything that you might look back on and regret," Mike told her, his hand caressing her head once more. "Not that you would, but I'd hate it if you had a bout of sadness or something and thought I was just feeling sorry for you. I've had enough psychology classes to know that even if it's not my major."

El was quiet for a moment, lost in thought. "I can understand that," she finally said. "I wouldn't want to feel that way either. You're right. Though...I definitely know I wouldn't regret kissing you so I'm going to keep doing that if that's okay with you." She didn't even wait for him to reply before her lips were on his again. He returned the kiss with enthusiasm. Their heads tilted to the perfect angle, mouths parted and tongues engaged in a tantalizing dance. The wind bellowed outside so loud it caused them to break from their reverie. They laughed. She snuggled back into Mike's side and they lay back on his bed, listening to the sound of the ongoing storm.

"Can you still stay in here with me tonight?" El looked up at Mike, her eyes pleading.

"Of course . I wasn't staying with you because I thought we were going to have sex. I was staying because you asked me to and I want to do whatever I can for you. If you want me to stay in here I will totally do that."

"Good. You're so warm. I don't want you to go." El squeezed him tighter and wrapped herself around him once again.

He squeezed her back and they rested in each other's arms until El

broke the silence. "Mike, I feel like an idiot for not asking, but do you have a girlfriend? I'm going to feel like shit if you do and I'm here asking you to sleep with me and hold me and, oh Christ. I should have asked earlier..." El trailed off and buried her head in his chest once again, embarrassed that she might be interfering with his life.

"No, I don't have a girlfriend. I don't even date much. Well, I don't think you can call it "dating" if you go out for drinks twice in three years with two different people. I think that's just hanging out."

"Why don't you have one? You're smart, funny, a lot of other things girls find attractive." *Cute, ridiculously hot, the sweetest person ever...*

"I just never found anyone I really wanted to spend more time with." *No one was you*, Mike thought to himself.

"What about you? Do you have a boyfriend?" Mike flipped the question back to her.

El snorted. "Like anyone would want to date me. I'm so weird. And I'm super shy so if anyone was even interested I'd never know because I probably wouldn't even give them a chance to talk to me. I guess I'm my own worst enemy when it comes to that stuff."

"What are you talking about? You're one of the most caring people I've ever known and I haven't even seen you in a few years. You're drop dead gorgeous and don't seem to realize it, which is even more sexy. You're smart, you work really hard in school and are going to be an excellent psychologist someday. I can only assume that's what you want to be because of the classes you told me you're taking. But you could do anything. I know that anything you wanted to do you could be great at." Mike kissed the top of her head.

"You think I'm pretty?" El asked, incredulous.

"Really pretty," Mike smiled down at her. "Even when you're super tired. Your eyelids are heavy, I can tell. You should get some sleep. We can talk more tomorrow. I think we'll probably be inside all day, at least it sounds like it's awful outside. I don't want to go out in it." Mike pulled the covers up over her shoulder and they snuggled together as the wind whipped around the building. El drifted off in a

matter of minutes, her head resting on Mike's chest and her arm draped across his midsection. He was happy to sleep that way and drifted off himself.

The weathermen had been right in their predictions about the storm. During the night the freezing rain turned to snow, drifts piling up against the buildings and cars parked along the street, and the snow was still falling when Mike awoke late the next morning. He looked down at the ethereal beauty at his side, not believing this was the sight he was waking up to see. He knew she had used his shampoo the night before but somehow she still smelled like peaches. As quietly and delicately as he could he slipped out of bed and padded into the kitchen to make a pot of coffee. As much as he wanted to stay until she awoke, he was afraid that the night before might have been all due to her vulnerability and he couldn't stand it if she woke up and looked disappointed that he was lying next to her. So he made himself busy with the beginnings of breakfast.

Not long after, El's eyes fluttered open and she took in her surroundings. She remembered that she was in Mike's bed but he was no longer next to her. She sighed, feeling the cold spot where he had been earlier. She had wondered what it would be like to wake up with him, what they would say to each other, if he would kiss her. She shook her head. *He was just being nice. Sure, you kissed a lot, but it's college. People do that.* She sat up and stretched and pulled on the pajama pants Mike had lent her and put the frog socks back on her feet. She stopped at the bathroom and brushed her teeth, both because it was morning and because it would buy her a few more minutes to think of what she was going to say when he inevitably told her that he should have stayed on the sofa last night. She felt dejected.

As El walked into the kitchen area Mike was scrambling eggs. He looked up and smiled brightly at her. "Good morning! I didn't know what you'd want to eat so I'm making eggs and I have waffles in the toaster and coffee is in the pot." Mike finished off the eggs and started to divide them amongst the two plates he had set on the counter. Just as he set the skillet down the toaster dinged and four waffles popped up.

"Eggos? I love Eggos!" El looked at Mike as though he had just given

her a car.

"Two for you and two for me. Do you want orange juice or milk?"

"Juice. I can help you."

"Just take the plates to the coffee table and I'll bring the juice and glasses. I don't want your eggs to get cold." El did as he asked and they were soon eating in a comfortable silence.

El thought for a minute, chewing on a piece of waffle. She looked at Mike. "What? Do I have something on my face?" Mike asked, wiping his face with his napkin.

"No, I was just thinking about the last time we had Eggos together. Do you remember? You probably don't. It wasn't a big deal. Well, it was to me, but that was because no one was ever nice to me back then."

Mike did remember. He had thought about it a lot over the years. One day in junior high he had gone to school early to talk to the AV Club sponsor. When he parked his bike, he could hear someone crying just behind the wall next to the bike rack outside of the school. Being the inquisitive boy he was, he went to see who was crying. There, sitting with her back against the wall and her knees pulled up to her chest, making herself as small as possible, was El Hopper. Mike had always thought she was the prettiest girl he'd ever seen and he wanted to see what was wrong. He sat down next to her and asked her if she wanted to talk about it. She looked at him and said no, that it was some stuff that had happened at home, and he nodded his head and just sat there with her while she cried. He had wanted to comfort her but he didn't know how so he took some Eggos that he'd brought with him out of his pocket, unwrapped the plastic wrapper, and offered her one. She smiled at him as she took it and they sat in silence eating their Eggos. He noticed she stopped crying and felt like maybe he had helped in some way. He mumbled something about needing to go see the teacher he'd come to talk to and got up. As he walked away he heard her say, "Thanks, Mike," ever so softly. So many times he wished that he had stayed with her that day. So many times he wished he had tried harder to be her friend.



"I remember. You were crying. I should have stayed there with you. I should have hugged you at least." Mike looked down at the floor, hating his 14-year-old self for not being brave enough.

"You helped me. You were nice to me when no one else was. I used to watch you at the bike rack with your friends. I loved to hear you laugh. It made me feel like the world wasn't hopeless. I'd feel better if I saw you in the hallway. You'd always smile at me, even if before you saw me you'd had a scowl on your face. I should have tried to talk to you more." El reached over and put her hand on his. "It's not all your fault we didn't connect." Mike turned his hand so it was holding hers and rubbed circles on the back of her hand with his thumb.

"I always smiled at you because every day I told myself that day would be the day that I'd talk to you and every day I backed out. I was always glad to see you. I just didn't have the confidence to talk to a pretty girl. Well, to me, the prettiest girl." Upon hearing his, El could feel her ears turning red. She was not used to compliments, especially coming from someone she had (well, she can't deny it now) *feelings* for. El squeezed Mike's hand and smiled at him, holding her gaze longer than she normally would. They looked into each other's eyes, both trying to convey years' worth of feelings to the other, not having the words to do so.

After breakfast, while Mike was putting the dishes away, El went to the window to see the effects of the storm. She felt Mike's presence beside her and they both looked down at the street below, blanketed with so much white that only the tops of cars could be seen. It looked like three or four feet of snow in some places.

"Damn. I guess I won't work on my tan today." Mike deadpanned, causing El to giggle. "What do you want to do? We pretty much can watch movies or read silently. I vote movies." Mike crossed to a small cabinet that housed his movie collection. "Here's what I have."

El looked through the shelves. She immediately saw one of her all time favorite movies *Clue* and said if nothing else, they had to watch that.

"Really? I love that movie too! Okay, we'll definitely watch that.

Maybe after that something scary and then find something lighter after the scary movie?" Mike asked, his face hopeful that she would like his plan.

"That sounds terrific. *Clue* first?" El was already making her way to the sofa, sitting and pulling Mike's fuzzy blanket over her. They were both still in their pajamas but since they would be stuck inside all day there was really no reason to get dressed.

Mike inserted the movie and turned off all the lights. It was still not dark in the room because of the blinding white snow outside reflecting into the apartment but it added some ambience to the place and there was no glare on the television. He sat down on the sofa but not right next to El, which caused her to frown and look at the floor, but he didn't notice. The movie started and within the first fifteen minutes El had scooted closer to Mike and he pulled the blanket over the both of them. She took that as her cue that it was okay to snuggle into his side so she did just that. He immediately put his arm around her and held her hand with his free hand. El felt like her heart would burst but she just calmly held his hand and relished in his arm around her. They watched the movie, including all three endings, both agreeing that the one with Wadsworth being the killer was the best ending. After the movie she looked up at Mike and they could both tell there was an electric energy feeling around them but Mike broke it when he asked if she wanted anything to drink or a snack. She had to admit that she could use something to drink so they took a break from the movies to go to the kitchen. She hopped onto the counter to sit while Mike got some soda from the refrigerator and started working on some Jiffy Pop popcorn. She was sitting on the counter near the stove while he was working with the popcorn. From her perch she was almost at his eye level, just an inch or so below it.

"If I sit here I'm almost as tall as you." El laughed. Mike had turned on the stove and with her comment he stepped in front of her to see if that was indeed true. It was very close. He was standing in between her legs and trying to see how much his head went above hers when he noticed how close he had gotten to her and how her eyes had not left his, except to look at his lips for a second. He moved in closer, their noses brushing together as they each tilted their heads, lips almost touching...

POP!

"Shit, the popcorn!" Mike pulled away and shook the tray so as not to burn their snack. He succeeded and El told herself that she shouldn't be so eager. That if it was going to happen it would happen. She just had to keep being open. Mike poured the popcorn into a bowl, they grabbed their drinks, and got ready to start the next movie. They had set the food down and were both standing in front of the sofa, about to sit, when Mike said, "Oh, I forgot something." El was about to ask what when he caught her lips in a kiss and her knees buckled a bit, causing her to grab onto his shoulders. He finished it off with one smaller, but just as sensual kiss, and then sat down.

"I have been meaning to do that all morning. I'm sorry if it was too much."

El was a little speechless so she just sat down beside Mike, looking at him with her wide doe eyes. "Um, wow. No, that was good. That was very good."

"So what should we do now? It's almost 2:00. I guess we should have saved the popcorn and just had lunch but I can always make more popcorn. It's not a problem."

"Let's save the popcorn. I don't want to be a bad guest, but would you mind if I took a nap? I hate to even ask but I don't want to fall asleep watching a movie later." El yawned and looked to Mike.

"Of course you can take a nap, El. Do you want to sleep in my bed or here on the sofa? I can leave you alone to get some rest. I have books I can read." Mike sounded so sincere she had to smile.

"I'll just go to your room. That way you can have the tv and the kitchen and don't have to worry about me being in the way." El got up and started down the hall.

"You're not in the way, El. But you probably will be more comfortable in there so have a nice nap. Don't sleep forever." Mike winked at her, not wanting to miss out on spending as much time as he could with her, but knowing how it was to be tired. He wanted her to feel her best. El winked back at him and vanished into his bedroom.

By the time El awoke from her nap, refreshed and feeling like the unfortunate events at campus the day before had never happened, the sun had set and it was actually dark outside. She could still hear the wind howling. She tiptoed into the bathroom, brushed her teeth again and freshened up, and silently walked into the living room. Mike had fallen asleep on the sofa, sitting up with his head tilted back on the cushion. The only light was emanating from the television and casting colorful shadows on his pale face. El drank in the sight, noting how peaceful he looked and how his hair flopped back with his head. She had to touch him. She reached out and gently traced her finger along his jawline, then across his lips. He was so pretty. She sat down next to him, her legs folded underneath her, and barely kissed his jaw near his ear. She nuzzled her face into the crook of his neck and he started to awaken.

"Did you sleep well?" El asked, smiling coyly at him as he turned his head on the cushion to look at her.

"I didn't mean to. I was watching tv and the next thing I knew, here you were. It's a nice way to wake up, to be sure." Mike whispered the last part, as El was still very close to his face.

"Do you want to watch another movie? A scary one this time?" El giggled as she asked him. "Which ones do you have?"

Mike turned on a lamp and together they inspected his video collection. They decided upon *The Shining* as they had both read the book but El hadn't seen the movie. They found their seats on the sofa, this time the two of them instinctively snuggling under the blanket. El found herself reaching for Mike's hand pretty soon into the movie and she didn't let go except for when she jumped into his lap at one tense jump scare.

"Scared?" Mike chuckled. She was sitting in his lap and had her head buried in his shoulder.

"Surprised. It's the score. The music makes it so much worse. Though the book is much more scary. And it made me cry, which this movie has not." El harrumphed. Mike just laughed.

"I agree, but the movie is good for what it is. It's not Stephen King's

*The Shining* but it has some good things in it. It's definitely worth watching with a date." Mike tickled her as she was still sitting in his lap. She fell off laughing and conceded that yes, it was a good movie for just watching. Scary.

Mike made them grilled cheese for dinner, which they ate while they watched an episode of *Roseanne* and when they finished it was almost 9:00.

"I don't know how late you want to stay up tonight but we could watch *Star Wars* if you wanted. I have them all. We don't have to watch the whole trilogy but..."

"I like *Star Wars*." El stated. "I think *Empire* is my favorite but I like them all."

Mike gawked at her.

"Do you know how extremely hot it is that you just called that movie *Empire*? Jesus fuck. You are full of surprises." Mike grinned at her from over his shoulder as he was standing by the video cabinet and she was still on the sofa.

"I had a crush on this guy who was really into *Star Wars* but I was too afraid to talk to him so I just read the books I knew he liked and watched the movies I knew he loved. He was always talking to his friends about it so it wasn't hard to figure out his favorites. It turned out that I really liked them too."

Mike stared at her slack-jawed and she just smiled at him sweetly, though her eyes gave off a more seductive glint. Mike shook himself out of his stupor and made his way to his seat on the sofa as the opening crawl of *The Empire Strikes Back* started moving. Under the blanket their hands brushed together and El couldn't decide if she had taken his hand or if he had taken hers. Either way, it felt nice just to sit there holding hands. He'd get so engrossed in the film that she was finding herself staring at him, watching him watch something he loved. It made her heart happy. He noticed her staring.

"What?"

"Nothing. I was just watching you. You're making the cutest faces while you watch this. You should see yourself."

Mike blushed but she couldn't see because of the darkness of the room. It was fine though. He smiled and squeezed her hand and they proceeded to watch Han get frozen in carbonite. El watched out of the corner of her eye as Mike mouthed all the dialogue along with the movie. The *I love you, I know* part was especially endearing.

It was late when the movie finished. El wanted to stay up with Mike and do whatever but she didn't want to seem too needy or too forward. She had been so into him all day, wanting to touch him but holding back, wanting to kiss him but waiting for him to make the first move, and she thought maybe she should just go to bed and figure out how tomorrow might go, since it was clear from outside that she would be there at least until Monday. She pulled herself from his side and stood up.

"I think I'll go to bed. I'll let you get some rest. If you want to switch and me sleep out here tonight it's totally fine. Just let me know," El quietly said, not really wanting to go to bed but not knowing what to do otherwise.

"You can sleep in my bed, El. I hope you have better dreams tonight." Mike stood up before she could leave the room. "I had a really great day with you. It was a lot of fun. This has been the best storm I've ever dealt with." Mike smiled, closing the gap between them and embracing her before she could say anything. "Sleep well, El," he whispered into her ear before he let her go. She couldn't even speak so she just nodded and half smiled and ambled down the hallway and into Mike's room.

Mike wished she had wanted him to sleep in his bed with her again but he wasn't going to suggest it. She had been all he could think about all day, wanting to hold her and touch her and kiss her but restraining himself unless she gave what he took as a signal that she wanted him close. At least she hadn't seemed unhappy when he did kiss her. And she had reached for his hand and kissed him too. That had to mean something.

El couldn't sleep. She wasn't having nightmares or worries about

school but she couldn't stop thinking about Mike. Before she could talk herself out of it, she left his room and made her way to the living room where he was sleeping on the sofa. He shifted and opened his eyes, making out her figure in the moonlight.

"El?"

"Mike," El whispered. She came closer and he could see she was once again wearing a pair of (different) X-men Underoos and one of his shirts from his drawer. It looked like a Star Wars shirt from what he could tell. "I'm sorry. I just...I just. Oh, ugh. I want to be near you."

Mike held his blanket back so she could slide in next to him on the sofa. It was a tight fit with them lying side by side, even on their sides, but neither of them cared.

"Hi," Mike breathed.

"Hi," she sighed back.

His arms around her, Mike pulled her closer and their faces rubbed against each other, both teasing the other with almost kisses, wanting to see who gave in first. It was El. She could only take his lips grazing hers so many times before she had to catch his lower lip and then slowly suck, letting her teeth brush against his lip and eliciting a groan. They went back and forth, trading long kisses, getting deeper and then slower, until El once again moved to get on top of Mike. This time he let her.

"Are you sure?" Mike asked, worried that she was doing this for him and not for her.

"God yes. I need this Mike. I need you. Don't worry. I'm on the pill. Have been since I was 17 for medical reasons." She then sat up, her legs still straddling his hips, and took off her shirt.

That did it for him. He peeled off his own shirt and then pulled her down, their bare chests crashing together and them both feeling the luxury of skin on skin. He looked down, as the blanket had fallen to the floor, to see what he thought of as the perfect woman sitting on top of him in the cutest underwear he'd ever seen and nothing else.

He had to bite his knuckles and slow himself down. She bent forward and continued the kiss, more passionate now, soft moans and sighs coming from both of them. She reached for the waistband of his pants, tugging on them, and then got off so that he could stand up and take them off more quickly. Both standing, Mike leaned down and kissed her again, his hands trailing to her hips and his thumbs sliding into the waistband of the only clothing she was wearing. He hesitated, waiting for her to give him the okay to proceed.

"Yes, keep going." El pushed his thumbs further down so that the shorts started to slide down her legs. She could feel his hands on her bare hips and her arms snaked around his neck to pull him down more.

They ended up almost falling back onto the sofa, Mike on top of El, and she could feel him against her leg. Her center was more than ready and while she'd like to make a long drawn out affair of this, she was too turned on to want anything other than the main attraction . The rest could come another time. She was sure even before they really started that she'd want another time.

As her hand found Mike's member, he pulled back from kissing her. "Are you absolutely sure, El? I want you so much but I can wait as long as it takes. I promise."

El smiled, pulled him into a kiss, and continued to pull his lower half closer with her other hand. Mike felt her warmth . She nodded and he pushed inside, going teasingly slow.

"Mike! Deeper, please!" El begged as he slowly inched his way in. He was doing it on purpose, not wanting to hurt her, yes, but also wanting to see how badly she wanted it. He grinned as she pleaded with him and he was only halfway in.

"I don't want to go too fast." Mike tried not to laugh as he said this.

El wrapped her legs around his waist, looked at him sternly, and pulled him all the way inside. She was small but she was scrappy, he had to give her that. Currently though he had to try to think because all he could do was feel how tight she was and how warm and how wet and absolutely amazing she felt. He knew he had to hold out



long enough for her to climax and he hoped he could. She just felt so good.

El was having her own problems thinking. Mike was buried so deep inside her and it was as though he was supposed to be there, like something had been missing and now it wasn't. She could feel the rocking of his thrusting back and forth and was already feeling the wave start to build. She didn't want it to be over too quickly though.

"Switch with me. Sit up, let me get on top." El pushed him up so that he was sitting on the sofa. She straddled him once more, lining him up with her core and pushing him all the way in with one stroke.

"Holy shit, El!" Mike groaned in ecstasy.

From this position he could wrap his arms around her and she could kiss him all she wanted without him having to hold himself up. It felt so much more intimate this way. He pushed her hips down, causing her to grind into him, as she wrapped her arms around his neck and kissed him deeply. She was moving but was letting him do all of the pushing and pulling or rotating or whatever he was doing that was about to send her over the edge. She could feel it coming and buried her face in his neck as she rode him to her peak.

"Don't stop, Mike. I'm almost there!" Whispered into his ear, her breath hot and causing him to need to bite his lip to hold out for her. He was also so close.

"Mike! Oh, Mike!" El called out as Mike felt her spasm around him. Her mouth had been so close to his ear when she said this that it instantly caused him to push all the way into her and finish harder than he thought he ever would.

"El!" He held her close as they both regained their composure. She stayed where she was and he rubbed her back in slow circles as both of their breathing came back to normal. He moved his hand to cup her cheek and brought her face to his for a kiss.

"That was..." Mike started.

"Amazing," El finished. She hugged him as he slid them both back

down to lying on the couch, pulling the blankets up over them and feeling her wrap herself around him. It felt right. It felt like it was how it was always supposed to be. He kissed her once more and they both drifted off to sleep holding on to each other.

### Chapter 3

Mike awoke to the still darkened living room. The clock on his television stand read 3:15. He was cold and he figured that was what had awakened him. El was sound asleep but the blanket had fallen down and was only covering them half way. She never stirred as Mike slipped out of her embrace, stood up, and picked her up to take her into his bedroom where they would most definitely be warmer. He gently set her down on his still unmade bed and she rolled to her side, facing away from where he was standing, about to get into the bed himself. As he pulled the covers up he wrapped himself around her, spooning her and almost completely enveloping her small warm body in his. She felt so perfect in between his arms. He couldn't imagine how he had ever slept soundly before the past couple of nights.

They slept well into the late morning hours. El awoke first, seeing that she was back in Mike's room and at first thinking the night before had all been a dream. Then she realized that there were arms around her and she knew she had not been dreaming. She rolled over so she could look at him as he slept. He didn't move, so lost in slumber that he couldn't detect that she had changed position. She looked at his freckles, his eyelids slightly fluttering in what must have been a dream. She pushed his hair back gently to get it out of his eyes, feeling how soft it was, her hand lingering in his locks. Just a couple of days ago she had been steadfastly working on her major, trying to finish everything before finals, and now what mattered to her was that she wasn't sure how she was going to be away from him for any amount of time. She would have told anyone else, if they had come to her with this same issue, that it was silly to be so attached in such a short period of time, but she really felt something for him. He felt like...well, he felt like *home*. But no home she had ever known. No home with fighting or yelling or crying. He felt like love and safety and understanding and he felt like something she never wanted to leave.

El kissed his cheek, barely ghosting her lips over his skin. Even in sleep he turned toward her kiss, his face just inches from hers. She kissed his forehead gently and softly. Her hand had gone to his chest and she could feel his heartbeat under her palm. She kept her hand over his heart and put her head on the other side of his chest, ducking her head lower to do so. He felt so warm. She wanted to stay in his embrace all day.

Mike's eyes opened and he could feel El's hair under his chin. His hand went up to cover the hand she was holding over his heart.

"Hey. I hope you don't mind that I moved you in here. It was too cold out there . You've been cold enough this weekend." Mike kissed the top of her head and she looked up at him, her arms staying wrapped around him.

"I didn't even know we had moved. I slept great. I think I might have slept better last night than I can remember in a long time. I usually am a very light sleeper. Max says she can't even brush her teeth without waking me up. You must have used some sort of sorcery to move me without me knowing." El laughed, placing a chaste kiss on his lips.

Mike chuckled. He felt happy that she had slept so well with him. It had never felt weird, it felt right. Like something he knew long ago but lost had come back to him and everything he had felt in the past had multiplied by a thousand. He caught her staring up at him and had to kiss her . He tried to pour all his emotions into the kiss, holding her head while their lips worked together, massaging the other's with feelings they dare not yet speak aloud. The morning went like that, with them going from lazy deep kisses to full on lovemaking again (even though they wouldn't call it that, but it's all anyone looking in from the outside would be able to call it), each being so sensual and caring and making sure the other is feeling everything they want them to feel. El thought she could stay like this forever, though she didn't voice it. She just followed Mike's lead and tried to make him feel as good as he made her feel.

"I need to call Max and see if she's coming back tonight or if I should stay here another night." El said after their second bout of fooling around. Of course Mike wanted her to stay with him again but he

wanted to be the guy who was cool with whatever she wanted to do.

"Sure. Use the phone in the kitchen if you want some privacy. I do hope you'll come back soon though." He winked at her as she got out of bed, pulling a blanket around her naked body go to the phone.

"I'll be as fast as I can. I promise." El smiled at him.

She called Max's mom's house and asked if Max was still there. Max's mom told her that she had left about an hour earlier but that the road conditions weren't great so she was sure Max would have to go slowly. They both laughed over the thought of Max having to drive slowly, how she would be yelling at drivers to go faster and getting more and more road rage. Max's mom said that Max was trying to get back to their apartment before 5:00. She seemed to think it wouldn't be a problem. The roads had been plowed in Hawkins as well and if they salted the highway it shouldn't take her forever, barring other drivers. El thanked her for the information and ended the call.

"Max should be home around 5:00 today . I guess I should plan on going back to my apartment tonight." El said as she got back into bed with Mike.

He looked sad. He wanted her to stay another night.

"I washed your clothes and dried them while you were asleep yesterday afternoon."

El was taken aback . She knew he'd said they would do that but that he had done it while she was taking a nap, without her asking or even mentioning it, was one of the sweetest things she had ever had done for her. She threw her arms around his neck and pulled herself into him, wanting to remember how he felt, remember his skin on hers and how his heartbeat felt on her own chest.

"What else did you do while I was asleep?" El inquired.

"I just made a couple of phone calls. Just some school stuff. Nothing major." Mike smiled and kissed her again. The day before while her laundry was washing and she was napping in his bedroom, Mike had called his favorite biology professor who also happened to be the

head of the biology department. He had told Dr. Owens all about El's run-in with her abnormal psych teacher, Professor Brenner, and Dr. Owens immediately knew who he was talking about. He told Mike that there had been other accusations against that professor and that he had even tried to hit on Dr. Owens' wife at the faculty Christmas party the year prior. Dr. Owens said that he would add this to the list of allegations of misconduct but that he'd had enough of hearing about this guy and wanted his university to have a reputation for learning and excellence, not sexual harassment, so he was going to go to the dean of students and the board of trustees and have something done about the problem. Mike was elated. He thanked Dr. Owens and finished El's laundry. He decided not to say anything about it because if it didn't work out he didn't want to have gotten her hopes up for nothing. He was pretty sure that Dr. Owens would make things right though.

"Busy bee. No wonder you fell asleep too." El ran her hands through his hair yet again.

Mike looked into her eyes . He didn't mean to speak aloud what he was thinking but his mind and his mouth were not cooperating.

"I'm going to miss you when you go."

He cringed inwardly at how desperate and needy he thought he must sound.

"You can see me any time, Mike. Believe me, I'm going to miss you too," El said earnestly, her brow furrowing, biting her lip as she registered in her mind that they would not be together in a few hours. Even if they started dating or whatever, she knew she'd have to sleep in her own bed and knew that it would never make her feel as whole as the two nights sleeping with Mike had made her feel. It was a sad realization.

He hugged her then, pulling her close . They both held on for what felt like dear life . It was as though they were each other's life preserver in a sea of cacophony and to let go would mean to become lost in a world of troubles. As long as they held on to each other the storms could come and go.

They made love once more, both of them taking their time. It was the most passionate session yet and El knew that it was because soon they would have to part . It only made it hotter. She made a mental note of how his face looked when she took him in her mouth and looked up at him as she went down as far as she could go, how his eyes were dilated and his face crumpled as though he couldn't believe what he was seeing. She went slowly, using her tongue and teasing him until he couldn't take it anymore and pulled her up so he could kiss her, plunging into her with such quickness and dominance that it took her breath away. They came together, each singing the other's name, and both held on to the other for long after they had sated themselves, neither wanting to let go. They both knew she would be leaving soon.

El finally said what Mike had been dreading.

"I should get my things together and head back home."

Mike squeezed her tighter. "I wish you didn't have to go."

"I do too. But Max will wonder where I am and I need to let her know what happened at school. I want to see you again as soon as I can though. When do you think that would be? " El asked as she looked up into his eyes.

*As soon as you finish talking with Max. Live with me. I never want to be without you.*

"Whenever you want. If I'm busy I'll make time." Mike offered, afraid to say what he was really thinking.

They got dressed and Mike found all of his extra winter clothes, thinking he could bundle El up so she wouldn't be cold on the walk back. He knew his car would have too much snow around it to dig out and he would be walking for the next few days. There was no way he'd let her walk back to her place alone though. He felt like he needed to protect her at all costs. El had gone to the bathroom. She stood in front of the mirror. She didn't look different but she felt like a different person than the girl who had been shambling through the streets in the rain. *Why do I feel so sad? I will see him again soon. I can't possibly feel this strongly about him...maybe once I'm back home I'll think*

*more clearly.* El told herself these things, knowing deep inside that she was kidding herself.

Mike had his coat and gloves laid on the kitchen counter next to his keys. He was already wearing a beanie, his hair sticking out from the sides. Coming back into the room, El hugged him from behind . Mike turned and folded her into his arms. She was only going to be half a mile away but they both felt like there would be an ocean between them.

He gave her his favorite hoodie, his softest one, zipping it up for her as she stood in front of him. He found some extra galoshes for her to wear over her Chucks and inspected her to make sure he thought she'd be warm enough for the half mile walk back to her apartment. He had given her mittens and his extra coat and was placing a knitted beanie on her head as she stood up on her tiptoes and kissed his nose. He kissed her back.

"I guess we're ready," El said quietly.

"Guess so." Mike threw on his coat and gloves, put his keys in the pocket of his coat, and opened the door.

The sun was setting as the two stepped out of the building onto the sidewalk. Snow still covered the ground where it had not been plowed and while it was very cold, it was also very pretty. Streetlights reflected on the white shroud of snow, illuminating the walkway with pools of glowing radiance. They walked hand in hand, trying not to go too quickly, each wanting to make the most of the last minutes of their weekend together.

About the midway point Mike had hung back a step or two, their hands parting as El adjusted the hat on her head. She looked back at him, smiling over her shoulder.

"You look beautiful." The reflection of the snow made her eyes look as though they were full of stars. Mike stepped closer to her. She turned to face him, still smiling, but averting her eyes as color rushed into her cheeks . She bit her lip and looked back up at him. He kissed her then, his hand moving to her head, his long fingers slipping under the beanie and into her hair. It made her knees weak.

They finally arrived at her apartment. Mike was surprised at how close it actually was to his place. It was a half mile away but they had only had to make two turns. They climbed the stairs and El knocked, not sure if Max would actually be home and also having no keys.

Max opened the door.

"Ellie! Where were you? I got home and you weren't here but your purse is on the table. I was about to call the police!" At first Max didn't notice Mike standing in the hallway. "Wheeler? Mike Wheeler? I haven't see you since high school!" She pulled El through the door and Mike followed the two girls.

"It's a long story. I'll tell you all about it tonight." El turned to look at Mike, their eyes locking. "The short version is that Mike ran into me and took care of me while I was locked out of our place."

Max noticed the energy between Mike and El but she didn't say anything. She knew Mike Wheeler had a tendency to become a tomato when he was the subject of something he might find embarrassing and decided to let him off the hook and find out any details from El later in the evening.

"I can't wait to hear how you handled being caught in a snowstorm without your keys." Max laughed.

"It wasn't a snowstorm when I got caught in it. It was rain." Again El looked at Mike. Her words more meaningful to the both of them than how they sounded to anyone else.

"Mike, do you want to stay for dinner?" Max asked casually. She had put a frozen lasagna in the oven when she got home It would be ready soon.

"Thanks, but I should get back. It will be colder the later I stay out. You can tell El all about your trip back to Hawkins. I'm sure you'll need to regale her with tales about the booming metropolis that is our hometown." He chuckled and smiled but it didn't reach his eyes . He knew that if he stayed he'd want to stay the night and he didn't want to impose on Max. He also needed some time to think.



El looked disappointed but she also understood. She walked him back out into the hallway.

"I have all of your clothes here." El gestured to her body, still wearing the outerwear Mike had given her. "I can bring them back to you whenever." El looked down at the floor. *Why am I being so shy now? God, I don't want him to leave.*

"I can get them anytime. I don't need them." They both looked at the floor now. "I had the best weekend with you, El. Really. You...you're, um...you're amazing. I, uh, I...I enjoyed being with you."

El hugged him, her arms going around his neck so that he was pulled down toward her. "I had the best weekend too," she sighed, standing up on her tiptoes and whispering in his ear. "I think you're amazing. You're the best person ever."

He caught her lips in his as she moved her head away from his ear, their heads tilted and working together to say what they couldn't say. After one more kiss they broke apart. El rested her forehead on his. "Be careful walking home."

"I will. I'll see you soon. Go eat your lasagna. Tell Max I said bye." Mike smiled and kissed her one last time before he turned and walked towards the stairs. El watched him until his head disappeared down the stairway and sighed wistfully. She went back inside her apartment.

Mike had been right, it was colder on his way back home than it had been on their walk to El's place. But maybe that had been because he was with her. He shucked off his coat, gloves, and hat and sank down on the sofa. The blanket was still on the floor from the night before and he picked it up, feeling the softness. He closed his eyes and played everything back in his mind. Last night and the majority of today had been the best of his life.

Max and El sat at their kitchen table and ate their lasagna . El had been quiet as Max told her about home and how nothing had changed and she was bored about an hour after she got there. She wanted to ask about El's weekend. That seemed much more exciting than Hawkins had ever been.

"So, you have to tell me what happened. Why are you so mopey looking right now and why did I feel like a third wheel when Mike was here?" Max asked playfully. "And how did you pull that off? You've been in love with him forever and he just happened to find you in the rain? That's like a character in a freaking book!" Max laughed as she forked some pasta into her mouth.

El looked at her plate. "I know it sounds farfetched but that's how it happened. And I haven't been in love with him forever..." El trailed off that last bit, causing Max's eyes to bulge.

"Wait, what does that mean? Are you in love with him *now*? Jesus, El, I was kidding." Max still giggled.

"Max, this weekend. It, it was the most amazing two days of my life."

"What, did you sleep with him or something? Max continued to eat her food. She had known El for such a long time, she figured she knew the answer to that question. El wasn't the type to have flings or one night stands.

"Actually yes, well, Friday night anyway . But we were literally sleeping. He was so sweet. I had the worst time at campus which was why I was out wandering in the rain." El proceeded to tell Max all about Professor Brenner's advances and how she was now so worried about school and her scholarship. She told her about how Mike had found her and how caring he had been, making her take a shower to get warm because he was so worried about her health. She told her about her nightmare and how she'd asked Mike to stay with her.

"Tsk, ts, Ellie. Sounds like a missed opportunity to me." Max teased.

"Well that was Friday. I haven't told you about Saturday." El shot her a glance that made Max's eyebrows climb.

"Well let's have it, sista! I'll take these plates and we'll continue this little conversation on the couch. I have a feeling I'll want to be comfortable for this." Max grabbed their empty plates and set them in the sink. She'd wash them later, there were more important things to tend to currently.

They got comfortable on the couch and El told Max about her last two days, leaving out a few details that she wanted to keep for just herself and Mike. Max was floored that El had been so bold as to ask Mike to stay with her, but even more floored that she had gone to the sofa to sleep with him. She knew the girl must have it bad to ignore her usual idiosyncrasies in order to get what she wanted so desperately . She listened as El talked about the movies they watched, noting how her eyes would sparkle and she'd smile when she mentioned his name. Max wondered if Mike was feeling the same way El was, because clearly she was smitten. She had never seen El be so passionate about something that wasn't in a textbook. She hoped Mike was feeling the same because to see El's heart be broken would be the worst.

"So did you guys just sleep or what? I mean, you went to his couch when you had a nice warm bed. That doesn't seem like an upgrade just for sleep."

"Um..."

"El, you have to tell me! You can't build all this up and then not deliver!"

"We did more than sleep." El bit her lip, her eyes averted toward the floor as the memory swam back into her mind. "And it was fantastic. Max, I had no idea. It was never awkward and I fit against him like I was made to go there and he's so warm and his lips are so soft and...it was just perfect."

Max squealed, a little uncharacteristic for her, and pulled El against her in a side hug. "I'm so proud of you ! You wanted something and you went for it!"

El smiled. "Yeah, but now I already miss him and it sucks. I don't know how he feels. He said he didn't want me to go, he wanted me to stay at his place tonight, but I didn't want to worry you and I was a little insecure that he was just being nice."

"Call him. Ask him." Max said, like it was the easiest thing in the world.

"I can't just ask him something like that over the phone. I'll see him soon. It doesn't seem like it will be soon enough but I'll manage." El picked at the edge of the blanket she was covered with.

Max could tell that El was down, missing the boy who had only left a couple of hours ago. She put in one of their favorite movies *Girls Just Want to Have Fun* and they watched that, laughing and taking El's mind off of missing Mike somewhat. It was always there though. A yearning. When the movie was over the girls each got ready for bed. El was still wearing Mike's hoodie and kept in on to sleep in. It smelled like him and she inhaled deeply as she snuggled under her covers. As she fell asleep, her last thoughts were of him. "Night, Mike," she whispered to her empty bedroom.

Mike was having trouble sleeping. He was in his bed but it didn't feel the same as the night before. He wished his arms were holding her. He wished her hair was tickling his chin as her head rested on his chest, feeling her soft breath against his sternum. He tossed and turned, noticing that his sheets still smelled like her. He missed her so much. *I should have stayed for dinner. I should have stayed until Max kicked me out. El looked so disappointed when I left. I can't wait to see her again.* He finally went to sleep, thinking of El and hoping she would be in his dreams.

Max had decided that since neither of them had classes on Monday, they should clean the apartment. El wasn't excited for this but needed something to distract her thoughts. They had both slept in and after having some lunch Max got out the cleaning supplies and the girls went to work. El was lost in thought or seemed miles away all day. Max would ask her something and El might not even hear her.

"El, just call him already!" Max yelled from the kitchen where she was mopping the floor.

"I can't. It won't be enough. I want to hug him. I'll just end up rambling and sounding silly if I call."

"Whatever. You are going to drive yourself crazy. Or you're going to drive *me* crazy."

It was after sunset, going on 7:00 and the girls were eating dinner. El

just pushed hers around on the plate. Max was about to tell her to take two more bites and she could be finished (like she was the mother to a small child) when the phone rang.

"I'll get it." Max jumped up to answer the phone.

"It's for you, El." Max could see the change in El's facial expression, going from sad to hopeful. "It's someone older. An old guy." El frowned, confused, and crossed over to the phone.

She listened to what the caller was saying, agreeing here and there, saying "yes, sir" and "no, sir." Max was intrigued as to who might be on the other end of the line.

"Yes, next Wednesday at 3:00 will be fine with me. Thank you, so, so much!" As she put the phone back in its cradle she turned to Max, bubbling with excitement.

"I'm not going to fail! They're letting me take the test I missed next Wednesday at 3:00! I'm so happy, Max!" She and Max both jumped up and down, both excited for El's second chance.

"That's great, El! How did that happen?"

El thought about it. How exactly had that happened? She hadn't made a formal complaint about the professor. She hadn't had time to talk to her advisor.

*Mike.*

"I think Mike did something." El stopped jumping and got very quiet. "I took a nap and he must have called someone to help. He said he made a couple of phone calls about school stuff. I didn't think it was about me." El shook her head. *He said he would help and he did help. Everything he said he'd do he did . He saved my college career...like he saved me in the rain.*

"I think I'm going to go to bed early if you don't mind. I feel like my emotions have exhausted me. Goodnight, Max." El went into her bedroom. It was a little before 8:00. She sat down on her bed and let herself cry. They weren't sad tears, they were a release of worry, of happiness, of not knowing how she was going to fix her grades. They

were also tears for missing Mike and for how sweet he was and for how he tried to fix her problems. She cried herself to sleep, all of the emotions, both up and down, of the last few days culminating in the crying spell but making her feel better once she was done. She awoke a couple of hours later . Looking at the clock, it was 10:30. She slipped her shoes on, got her coat and a hat, and exited her bedroom. The apartment was dark, Max had gone to bed, the only light coming from the light they left on over the sink so they could see in the nighttime if they needed something in the kitchen.

She remembered her keys this time. She quietly left the apartment, locking it once she was out in the hallway. The moon was bright and the sidewalk was lit up from the reflection on the snow. She made her way to Mike's apartment.

Mike was in the bathroom brushing his teeth . He hadn't slept well the night before and didn't know if tonight would be better but he had to try because he had class the next afternoon. He rinsed his mouth and wiped his face . As he crossed the hall to his bedroom he thought he heard a knock at his door. It was late and he wasn't sure he'd heard anything but he figured he might as well check. He hadn't been looking forward to going to bed anyway.

He undid the locks and pulled the door open. Standing there was El. She was biting her lip again, something she did when she was nervous, but it was also one of the cutest things he'd ever seen.

"Um..." She looked up at him . He was smiling at her like he knew she was there but also thought he might be dreaming.

"I couldn't sleep."

Mike reached for her then, gripping her tightly in his arms and pulling her inside. He moved both hands to either side of her face, feeling her soft skin under his fingertips. He pushed an errant strand of her hair behind her ear as he bent forward to kiss her. Her arms went around his neck and he picked her up, her legs wrapping around him to keep herself up. Mike kicked the door closed with his foot and carried her down the hall to his bed, knowing that sleep wouldn't elude either of them tonight.

*Neither knew it then, but they would sleep side by side for all the years to come.*

**Hey, so this is the first story I've uploaded here and I couldn't figure out how to split it into chapters once it was already complete. I hope it is well received and want to thank anyone for reading. I love these characters so much. I had the idea for the X-Men Underoos and everything came from there. Totally seems like a gag gift the boys would buy for Mike. Thanks again!**